

# Kayak Fishing in the Northwest .....

by *Gleb Velikanov*

In a time when everything natural and outdoors is “in,” new takes on familiar, tried-and-true pastimes may appear. Enter kayak fishing, a relatively new sport that’s rising in popularity. It combines the thrill of fishing with paddling and has become one of the fastest-growing segments of the kayak market.

The invention of kayak fishing came about logically: why invest thousands of dollars into a conventional powerboat, when a kayak designed specifically for fishing can be yours for around a grand? “When fishing from a kayak, you are able to do nearly anything you would from a powerboat,” said Langston Kriel, a kayak fishing guru from The Kayak Shed in Hood River. “You can troll for salmon, jig for bottom fish out in the ocean and fish lakes that allow only non-motorized vessels—all from a kayak.”

Fishing kayaks have quickly evolved into sit-on-top models that are between 30 and 36 inches wide. Tie-down hooks and places for the external mounting of gear ergonomically surround the operator, putting everything within arm’s reach. That sort of layout makes the vessel stable during navigation or any procedure that fishing would require, while providing easy access to anything necessary or the ability to haul in and store caught fish.

Currently, fishing kayak manufacturers are improving existing models, while creating new ones,

to satisfy the demand. Kriel stated that good examples of those kayaks could be found in Hobie Mirage, Jackson Kayak and Ocean Kayak/Old Town lines, among others. Some fishing kayaks have a pedal drive; others feature an option for attaching an electric motor, rendering the kayak a motorboat in the eyes of the law.

Outside those exceptions, the telltale sign of a kayak is the use of a double paddle—anything with oarlocks is considered to be a rowboat. (Depending on state rules, one may find that registering a kayak is a lot easier than a powerboat.)

Accessing hard to reach fishing spots on shallow or narrow bodies of water is where a kayak excels. This dainty dart of a vessel can squeeze through the narrowest creek, then pack up and travel on top of a car or truck at the end of the day, no trailer necessary. Home storage is equally easy, with the kayak resting on a rack mounted on a wall, much like bicycles or skis. Maintenance is also a breeze with no motor to tend to, and minimal moving parts. Making sure the kayak is out of the way is almost the hardest task an owner will face when not on the water.

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Getting into kayaking in general, and kayak fishing in particular, does not have to be rocket science: most area outfitters offer classes and workshops, while their sales staff will guide an aspiring kayak fishing enthusiast towards a rig most suited for their needs.

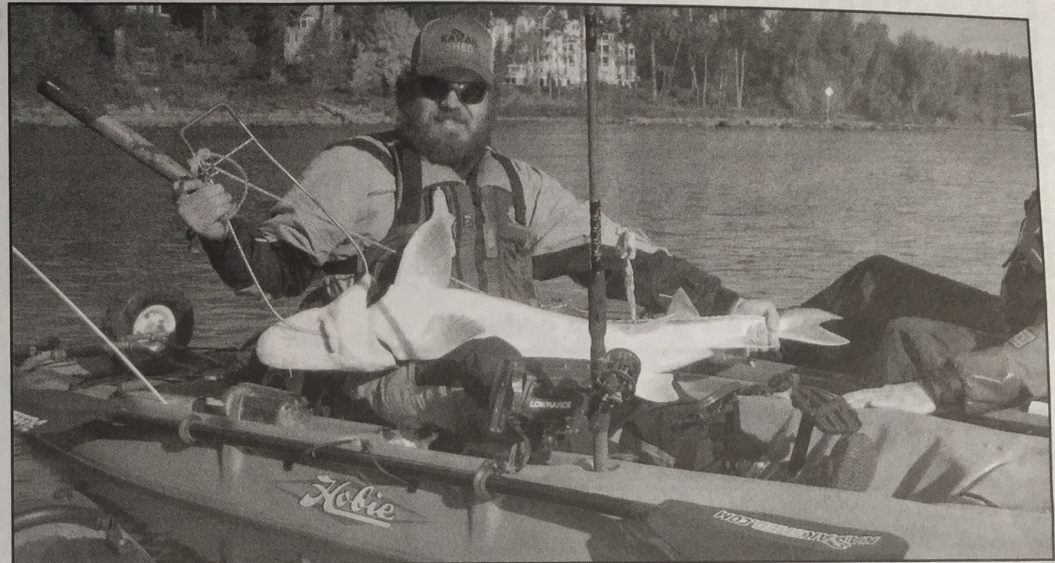
Kriel listed a few places to buy a kayak locally: Kayak Shed, Next Adventure, Alder Creek Paddle and Inflatable Boat Center. While details differ from store to store, most outfitters will make sure one can safely navigate the area rivers and lakes, some even applying the class enrollment fee towards the purchase of a kayak.

After a manageable training and familiarization period, any one can employ the very same fishing styles and techniques as they would aboard a larger boat. Kriel emphasized that getting to know how to operate a kayak is the main concern when transitioning into kayak fishing. Whether using a model with an option to stand up, or using one's tackle of choice sitting down, familiarity with moving and maneuvering the vessel is most important.

Keeping up with the modern trends, kayak fishing can contribute to remaining in decent physical shape, as it provides a good opportunity for cardiovascular endurance, promotes upper body and core strength. Of course, that is just the process of finding the fishing hole—the labors of fishing are sandwiched between getting there and back.

“Kayak fishing can be done just about anywhere a powerboat would go in both the ocean and freshwater. We can even go where most powerboats cannot, since we run shallow and launch anywhere we can access the water.” Said Next Adventure's own kayak fishing expert Nathaniel Olken. “Fishing is just more fun in a small boat, when you catch a big fish, it takes you for a “sleigh ride,” he added, “It is an unbelievable experience!” Olken emphasized the importance of recognizing the strengths and weaknesses of a human-powered vessel when out on the water.

For instance, it is much easier to fish on the relatively quiet



*A successful day kayak fishing.*

Willamette River, compared to the heavy winds and currents, typically experienced on the lower sections of the Columbia. Regardless of the location, kayak fishermen must abide by the same boating etiquette and follow the

same fishing rules as a person using a powerboat or bank fishing.

Using a new technique is bound to improve and enhance any practice, and fishing is no exception. So, whether fishing for steelhead on one of Willamette's tributaries,

sturgeon on the Columbia above the Bonneville dam, or even going after lingcod near Lincoln city, kayak fishing is the new and exciting way of going about it.